



*John Shaw Billings*

AN  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL  
FRAGMENT



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*1905*

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the author, John Shaw Billings, II, in 1964.**



April 1905

# Scheme of Autobiography.

- 1 When I first realized myself, on the  
hill side on Tristram Burgers' farm looking  
over Narragansett Bay at the white sails in the  
distance.
- 2 Life in Allensville  
In the store at Rising Sun.  
Making boots.  
The first study of Latin
- 3 Life at Miami University;  
The Library. Early Reading  
Robinson Crusoe Deer slayer & Pathfinder.
- 4 Life in Kentucky - The Bedingers.
- 5 Life as a Medical Student in  
Cincinnati. Blackman - Graham  
Sister Anthony.
- 6 Washington in 1861. Med Exam Rowell  
Dr Mrs Green. Union Hotel Hospital  
Hammond and Lettman.  
Cliff Luene Hospital.  
West Philadelphia

- 7 With the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, Battle of Chancellorsville  
Gettysburg.
- 8 In New York, Draft Riots, Devils  
Island. Draft Frauds Watertown,  
Bedloe Island. Expedition to Isle  
a Vache
- 9 Med Inspector Army of the Potomac -  
Wilderness - Zoole Tavern, Cool  
Harbor, In front of Petersburg.
- 10 In Washington, Surg Gen's Office  
Divisions of Accounts and Property  
Invalid Corps.
11. Library and Museum work
- 12 Hygiene & Hospitals, Baer's Hospital  
at Soldiers Home, John Hopkins  
Hospital.
- 13 National Bureau of Health
- 14 Building of The Army Museum -  
Index Catalogue. Index Medicus.
- 15 Statistical work, Census work,  
Sanitary Engineer work,  
work on ventilation.

Snaggen Generalship, Baxter &

- 16 Lectures at Columbia  
Dept of Hygiene Univ of Penn'a
- 17 New York Public Library
- 18 Carnegie Institution



I first got a realizing sense of my own personality or individuality when, a boy about 8 years old, I was at work on a hillside on the farm of Tristram Bueyes near Providence R.I. My father was the manager of this farm, and my business that sunny afternoon was to chop up and dig out by the roots all the Canada Thistles I could find in the pasture. I had read the Bible through - verse by verse, also Robinson Crusoe, Deerslayer, and the Pathfinder, and the Pilgrims Progress - but I had never done any thinking that I can remember. - But on this memorable afternoon I stood on the hillside and looked over Narragansett Bay, and wondered where all the Cat boats and Schooners with their white sails came from, and were going to. Then my thought took this turn - "The only person who ever knew that is God. He knows everything that has been, and is, and is to be. Then hundreds and thousands of years ago he knew that I should be here to day and that each of those boats would be just where it is, and that I should be thinking of them." Then as his knowledge must have been perfect it is absolutely necessary that I,



just I am, knowing just what I know, am here  
at this moment, looking at these ships, which  
also must be each just where they are.

Then everything must be arranged and ordered  
to be just as it is, and no one can prevent it.  
Therefore I am not responsible for where I am  
nor for what I do."

I was surprised at this conclusion, and  
thought I had made a great discovery,  
and resolved to tell my mother about it  
when she was worrying about our troubles.

I did tell her about it that night, and  
said that there was no use in worrying any  
more.

She looked at me in a scornful  
sort of way and said "Who's been teaching  
you about preordination?" "Nobody  
taught me," said I. "I found it out by  
myself — don't you see it must be so."

My life on the Niagara farm, from  
about 5 to 10 years of age, was that  
of an ordinary farmers boy. I ~~came~~  
drove the Miller Cart into Providence about 5  
A.M. and left the pigs and geese with  
the various customers - mostly of the  
poorer class. I dropped four of five grains  
of sweet corn in the proper place in the furrow  
in planting time. I helped weed the Cabbage  
Carrots and young beets, rode the horse  
for the horse raising of the hay crop, went  
to a country school for three months in the  
winter, made little clam bakes along the shore  
with my cousins William Henry and Charles  
Shaw, and read everything I could lay hands  
on. I managed to get a dollar for subscription  
to a little lending library in a book shop,  
and the first books I took out were Deerslayer,  
Pathfinder, and Jack o the Mill.  
I had for my own Robinson Crusoe, Marco  
Paul in the forests of Maine, Harry and Lucy,  
and Plutarchs Lives and was quite sure  
that I did not want to be a farmer.



When I was about 10 years old  
My father moved to Indiana and established  
himself in a little cross roads village  
called Allensville, on the road from  
Rising Sun to Vevay. Here he kept  
a Country Store - was Postmaster, and  
had a small shoemaker's shop in which  
one man was employed. I learned  
something of shoemaking - had some  
experience in keeping store, and  
incessantly, came across a book - I have  
forgotten its title - which had a number  
of Latin quotations in it, asked a young  
Clergyman (John C Bonham) how I could  
learn Latin - and got a Latin Grammar and  
Reader - a copy of Caesar, and a Latin  
Dictionary and set to work.  
It was difficult - but with the aid of Mr Bonham  
I made good progress. Then I made an agreement  
with my father that if he would help me through  
College in the least expensive way, all of his  
property should go to my sister and that I  
must expect nothing more. I then got some  
Greek books, a geometry book and went on to get  
myself to pass the entrance examination for the



Sub Freshman class at Miami University  
Ox Bow Ohio. I succeeded in doing this in  
a year - and passed the examination in the Fall  
of 1852. For the first two years I kept  
Bachelor Hall, living on bread, milk, potatoes, eggs  
ham etc - such things as I could cook for  
myself. The lessons gave me little trouble, most  
of my time was spent in reading the books in the  
College Library. I was omnivorous, read everything  
in English as it came. Philosophy, Theology,  
Natural Science - History Travels and Fiction.

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